

FURNISHED HISTORIC STRUCTURE MUSEUMS

Furnished historic structures compose a distinct category of museums worthy of separate examination. According to the National Park Service's *Manual for Museums*:

The peculiar requirements of furnished historic structure museums stem largely from two factors, one theoretical and the second purely practical. This kind of museum undertakes to recreate the environment of some historic person, event or period. An environment is a complex whole. Emphasis upon it rather than on individual specimens and simpler concepts affects development, operation and use at every turn. On the practical side the buildings these museums occupy were originally designed for other purposes Any museum that takes over a building secondhand has serious problems in adapting the space. When the structure is itself a specimen, the historic partitions, doors, stairways, windows, and other elements must remain or be restored as part of the setting. The preservation and display of objects and the handling of streams of visitors . . . under these relatively inflexible conditions demands adjustments that are seldom easy.¹

Furnished historic structure museums figure importantly in the history of historic preservation in the United States. After New York State saved George Washington's headquarters in Newburgh as a patriotic shrine in 1850, the conversion of revered old buildings to museums became for a century the normal way to preserve them from destruction or decay. Only later did preservationists move to rescue far more, if often less significant, structures by adapting them to new residential and commercial occupancies.²

Scant theorizing accompanied the early development of historic house museums. The incentive to save old buildings for public benefit generally arose from their association with famous persons or events. Less often structures were cherished because they recalled some period of national or regional importance, such as aspects of colonial or frontier experience. Perhaps still fewer buildings won redemption primarily on aesthetic merit; architectural exemplars lacking other historical associations seldom appeared to fulfill the commemorative intent. Making the structure a repository for objects related to its theme seemed to increase its interest and effectiveness.

The Jacob Ford House in Morristown, New Jersey, illustrates the historic process. The house served as Washington's headquarters during the bitter winter of 1779-80. In later years members of the Ford family kept one room furnished as they believed Washington occupied it. When the estate went on sale in 1873, four public-spirited citizens purchased the house with the room of historic furnishings and organized the Washington Association of New Jersey to preserve and administer it. New Jersey granted the association a charter that offered a state subsidy for "so long

as the building known as the Washington Headquarters shall be . . . held as an historic building, within which all the people of New Jersey may deposit articles of interest connected with the men and events of our Revolutionary struggle"3 Association bylaws called for the collection and preservation of papers, documents, relics and objects of interest related to the Revolutionary War. As noted in Chapter One, the association operated the house as a museum for sixty years until it became part of Morristown National Historical Park.

Exhibiting a combination of furnished rooms and miscellaneous displays, the Ford House functioned as a museum in the opinion of the association and the public. In later years the association employed a curator to look after the collection, which had broken through the commendably strict limits of its initial scope to include post-Revolutionary and non-military items. In all these respects the house fairly represented the museums that had developed from New York's prototype at Newburgh. Characteristically small and specialized, often isolated and with minimal staffing, they had little contact with the mainstream of museum thought. Laurence Vail Coleman of the American Association of Museums gave them barely a paragraph in his 1927 *Manual for Small Museums*.

Soon after, however, Coleman observed a rapid increase in the number of house museums and undertook a study of their nature and needs. He concluded that the automobile accounted largely for their proliferation: cars gave many more people the mobility to visit them, and they provided attractive destinations for motor trips. In *Historic House Museums* Coleman gave these institutions a name, a broad definition, and guidelines based on sound museum practice. His book appeared just as the Park Service began to grapple seriously with museums of this sort. Coleman noted this and issued a challenge: "National ownership is a new development and one which promises much at the hands of the National Park Service Clearly the opportunity lies in acquiring houses of primary significance representing the high points of the whole of American history."⁴

Historic House Museums in the National Parks to 1941

With his challenging statement Coleman listed eleven historic house museums for which the Park Service already had responsibility. Seven of these were newly acquired from other federal agencies in the 1933 government reorganization. The other four, plus one that Coleman's informants had evidently overlooked, provide the baseline of Service involvement with museums of this kind. Their park staffs had previously had no recognized museological guidance.

Tumacacori Mission introduced the Service to their peculiar problems, although it would be interpreted primarily in a separate site museum rather

than made a museum itself. It had been under Interior Department care since the establishment in 1908 of Tumacacori National Monument, which became one of the places originally assigned to the Park Service in 1916. The mission ruin was a gem deserving the Service's best architectural preservation and museum conservation efforts. By 1921 Frank Pinkley, the resourceful custodian of Casa Grande National Monument, managed to get a new roof on the ruin using native materials and traditional methods. Later he enlisted professional help from Service field headquarters in San Francisco and Berkeley: architects Charles Peterson and Kenneth McCarter inspected the mission in January 1930. Peterson's report expressing alarm at its condition apparently helped win an exceptional line-item appropriation for repairs. Pinkley also got Carl Russell, the museum expert from the Service's educational headquarters, to visit Tumacacori in April 1933. In considering the proposed site museum, Russell could not have failed to appreciate the vital role historical research needed to play in developing historic structure museums.⁵

The Service took on another historic house museum in 1923, still unrecognized as a museological project. Pipe Spring National Monument included a fortified dwelling erected by Mormon pioneers in 1870-72. A member of the last ranching family at Pipe Spring became its custodian and continued in that capacity for years, collecting furnishings, equipment, and other artifacts from other families of Mormon settlers in the vicinity. What he gathered he exhibited, doubtless with scant benefit of curatorial or interpretive refinement.⁶ The resulting house museum typified the many that led Coleman to set new guidelines. Pipe Spring received some curatorial advice and help after it became part of Pinkley's Southwestern National Monuments group, and in the late 1930s a CCC camp provided the labor for stabilization of the structure. Professional help in the care and display of the collection would come much later.

In contrast to Pipe Spring's isolation the other baseline cases lay uncomfortably close at hand. Congress in January 1930 established George Washington Birthplace National Monument, located within easy driving distance from Washington. The Park Service became responsible for completing and managing a project undertaken by the Wakefield National Memorial Association. Its centerpiece was a historic house museum. The house, unfortunately, was a conjectural reconstruction based on inadequate research. Like Tumacacori, this situation underlined the Service's need for professional historians, historical architects, and historical archeologists. It taught the Service less about furnishing historic structures. Ladies of the association long retained control of acquiring and arranging the contents of the house, largely at their own expense. The park custodian naturally responded to their requests and suggestions concerning aspects of the furnishings rather than consulting Service curators.⁷

Before the end of 1930 establishment of Colonial National Monument brought early prospect of two more house museums. Coleman listed one, the Lightfoot House, that proved of only passing concern as a museum. After Service architects restored this 18th-century house in Yorktown, it afforded temporary space for interpretive exhibits and public contacts until reconstruction of the larger Swan Tavern and its outbuildings provided more adequate quarters nearby. Some chairs, benches, and other occasional pieces reproduced from 18th-century examples helped create the desired atmosphere for park visitors seeking information.

The Moore House at the edge of Yorktown, on the other hand, became a bona fide historic house museum. This modest plantation home fitted Coleman's concept of having primary significance related to a high point of American history. In its parlor representatives from the opposing armies had drafted the surrender terms ending the siege of Yorktown. The structure still stood in 1930, although altered and decrepit. With generous help from John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and Colonial Williamsburg the new park patched up the house enough to display it during the sesquicentennial celebration of the victory. Then the Service undertook its definitive restoration. The eminent architectural firm of Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, deeply involved in the Colonial Williamsburg project, volunteered to carry out the work beginning late in 1932.

Charles Peterson, newly transferred to Service headquarters, engaged in an intensive study of the structure. He located numerous old views of the building in public and private collections as well as pertinent written documents. As the removal of interior plaster laid bare the framing, he continued structural studies. Careful analysis of the documentary and physical evidence resulted in a restoration of high standard. Feeling a moral obligation to preserve essential information to guide future students of the building and architects responsible for its maintenance, Peterson completed his involvement by compiling a detailed report presenting the data upon which the architects based their decisions and describing and illustrating the work performed. This document became recognized as the prototype of Park Service historic structure reports.⁸ The park now had a finely restored but essentially empty house.

The Moore House under restoration, the neighboring Lightfoot House, the problematical reconstruction at George Washington's birthplace, the remote Pipe Spring fort, and Tumacacori Mission embodied what little the Service knew about historic house museum problems and techniques in 1933 when Coleman's professional guidelines became available. No evidence suggests a quick adoption of Coleman's advice. Instead work continued through the 1930s on the basis of expedient decisions made in response to particular situations by the directorate or more often the field.

Perhaps the decade saw some greater caution in decision-making as experience accumulated.

The refurnishing of the Moore House illustrates the trial-and-error procedures of the period. The park surely wished to furnish it to a standard that would bear comparison with Colonial Williamsburg, its neighbor. To do so would require both money and expert knowledge of antiques. For the latter it called on Alfred Hopkins, who joined the park staff in the mid-1930s as a curator. The park had only a Windsor chair and parts of a clock from the original furnishings. Hopkins searched the wills of Augustine Moore, his wife, and her parents finding few items of furniture mentioned. The estate inventories of Mrs. Moore's parents contained more, if secondary, information. With this evidence he used his familiarity with antiques to compile a room-by-room list of likely furnishings. Then he consulted standard books, principally Wallace Nutting's *Furniture Treasury* and Thomas Ormsbee's *The Story of American Furniture*, choosing examples that he considered appropriate to the Moore House. Period, regional style, his conception of the Moores' tastes, and the sizes and proportions of the rooms influenced his choices. His bulky report, completed in April 1936, combined floor plans, furnishing lists, and photocopies of illustrations for each piece.⁹

Buying suitable antiques was costly, and finding the right pieces might take years of searching and dickering. The items would come one-by-one from many antique dealers and private collectors unaccustomed to federal billing and payment methods. These processes fitted poorly into normal appropriation and purchasing procedures. Perhaps foreseeing the difficulty, the park in this instance hoped to use non-government funds. The Yorktown Sesquicentennial Association had raised money for the 1931 commemoration and had vested some of it in a Committee for the Restoration of the Moore House. The park superintendent was treasurer of the fund, in which a balance remained.¹⁰

In April 1936 the Daughters of the American Revolution voted to sponsor the Moore House as a patriotic shrine and furnish the Surrender Room. Although this action doubtless followed discussions between the park and DAR officials, the two parties viewed the collaboration differently. The park assumed that the DAR would raise about \$5,000 from its chapters and asked that the money be deposited in the Moore House fund. The DAR on the other hand expected the chapters to donate furnishings found and purchased by interested members. In the spring of 1937 the Park Service director acquiesced in the DAR's selection of the furnishings subject to Hopkins' approval of the pieces chosen. To guide the ladies the park supplied a list of the desired furniture accompanied by pictures from Hopkins' report.¹¹

DAR officers and local dignitaries dedicated the furnished room in April 1938. About three months later Hopkins submitted an inventory. The ladies had provided a number of items not on his suggested list, and several of the pieces proved strikingly more elaborate than he had intended. DAR members had acquired and shipped most of the furnishings to the park without consulting him on their selection. He had rejected only four items as unsuitable. Unquestionably the room looked more richly stylish than he thought it should, but he expressed pleasure in the result. In keeping with the times he, like the ladies, viewed the room as a display of fine furnishings to be enjoyed as such. Any evocation of the tense atmosphere pervading the room at its moment of historical significance received scant consideration.¹²

The Daughters of the Cincinnati voted in December 1937 to refurnish the Moore House dining room. Hopkins suggested contributions of a dining table, four chairs, a serving table, a corner cupboard, a mirror, and a portrait. The Children of the American Revolution provided furnishings for a third room. The park acknowledged the help of each organization by mounting bronze tablets at the doors of the rooms. This well-meaning gesture violated one of Coleman's clearest guidelines—that warning against the intrusive effect of labels in a carefully recreated historical environment. Even more objectionable than identification or explanatory labels were those crediting donors or lenders, which Coleman called "monuments to human frailty."¹³

In 1933 the Service acquired seven properties classified by Coleman as historic house museums. Two came from the former Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital. One of these, the Joaquin Miller Cabin in Rock Creek Park, was not developed as a museum, but the other clearly fit the category.

In 1896 Congress had directed the purchase of the house across from Ford's Theatre where Abraham Lincoln died. Osborn H. Oldroyd lived there rent-free and displayed his extensive and eclectic collection of Lincoln memorabilia. The association of the house with Lincoln and its central location served the museum well, but the difficulty of fitting the objects and visitors in the cramped domestic rooms exemplified Coleman's warning against ordinary museums in historic buildings erected for other purposes. In 1926 Congress bought Oldroyd's collection, and in 1932 the Public Buildings and Public Parks office moved it across the street to the main floor of the Ford's Theatre building, renovated as the Lincoln Museum. Five women's patriotic societies then helped furnish three rooms on the principal floor of the House Where Lincoln Died, as it became officially known. Aiming to make the rooms appear as they had on the night of the assassination, the refurnishers relied in part on a floor plan sketched by one of the upstairs tenants soon after the event.¹⁴ The Service

probably made few changes in the furnishings until the intensive restudy that accompanied the Ford's Theatre restoration in the 1960s.¹⁵

Another recently refurnished home across the Potomac from Washington became a Park Service historic house museum in 1933. In 1925 Congress had authorized the War Department to restore the deteriorating Arlington House in Arlington National Cemetery. The act further instructed the secretary of war "to procure, if possible, articles of furniture and equipment which were then in the mansion and in use by the occupants thereof" and "in his discretion, to procure replicas of the furniture and other articles in use in the mansion during the period mentioned, with a view to restoring, as far as may be practicable, the appearance of the interior of the mansion to the condition of its occupancy by the Lee family."¹⁶ The Quartermaster Corps began work on the project in 1929. Private individuals and patriotic societies gave and lent furnishings to supplement what the War Department purchased. Arlington House began attracting visitors as soon as the project started and drew thousands of admirers once restored and refurnished.

Although Congress had specified restoring it to its 1860 condition, the refurnishing failed to support this objective. Donors, dealers, and those who made the final choices wanted the house to have fine pieces, worthy of a museum and of the commemorative intent. The period styles they chose tended to be ones currently favored. Consequently the rooms on display looked more like what George Washington Parke Custis might have wished for, could he have afforded it, when he started building Arlington in the early 1800s.¹⁷ When the Park Service came to realize the discrepancies between the 1860 appearance and the idealized restoration, the popularity of the house as visitors knew it would make revision doubly difficult.

The 1933 government reorganization transferred three additional structures from the War Department that Coleman listed as historic house museums. Two of these were masonry coastal fortifications that the Army had done little to develop as historical exhibits. Refurnishing their many rooms would be expensive, create repetitious displays, and offer little aesthetic attraction. The Park Service local staff seems to have proceeded with restraint when it took over Castillo de San Marcos (then called Fort Marion) in St. Augustine, Florida. It developed effective signs and markers to interpret the various features and interior spaces. Objects were later placed on exhibit in two or three of the casemates to help fill in the historical background.

At Fort McHenry in Baltimore, circumstances tempted further development. Within this fort four freestanding buildings flanked the parade ground, dominating the view of visitors entering through the sally port. Two floors of empty rooms in each of these garrison quarters constituted a vacuum interpreters found hard to tolerate. When the Park Service

assumed administration of Fort McHenry, the park was offered custody of a large local private collection of military firearms. Carl Russell visited the fort in February 1935 and worked to support display of the collection there, although it had little to do with the fort's primary historical significance. He gave no indication that he thought of refurnished rooms or considered the fort a historic house museum subject to Coleman's guidelines.¹⁸

The park perhaps took a broader view. In April 1936, apparently at local initiative, the National Society of the United States Daughters of 1812 gave the Service reproduction furnishings for some of the officers' quarters at Fort McHenry. According to a contemporary account, "Pieces presented were carefully reproduced from data and sketches assembled after months of research on the part of antiquarians, museum curators and historical technicians."¹⁹ Although Coleman's book advised against mixing formal exhibits with furnished rooms in historic house museums, the Service empirically concluded that it was acceptable to do so under specific conditions. A fort, for example, might contain so many similar rooms that appropriate formal exhibits might occupy some of them effectively separate from those furnished.

The third structure obtained from the War Department and listed as a historic house museum had only one room. At the site of Abraham Lincoln's birth a simple log cabin, then widely believed to have been the one in which Lincoln was born, had been enshrined in a classic memorial structure. As a symbol, the cabin did not call for the kind of interpretation to which refurnishing would contribute. Neither the War Department before transfer nor the Park Service afterward undertook to treat it as a museum.

The remaining museum on the 1933 list, the Ford House described earlier, came to the Service that year with the establishment of Morristown National Historical Park. Shortly after the new park received Public Works Administration funds for a new museum building, the acting superintendent announced plans "to remove most of the contents of the Headquarters Mansion to the new museum when completed and to refurnish the house as nearly as possible as it was during the Revolution."²⁰ This statement, made surprisingly early in development planning, indicates an intent to bring the existing historic house museum into step with Coleman's guidelines. Thomas T. Waterman, a historical architect of established reputation, undertook a careful analysis and restoration of the Ford House. Park historian Melvin J. Weig followed with a report aimed at improving the authenticity of the furnishings, but the house reopened looking much too fine and comfortable to reflect conditions during Washington's occupancy.

Park Service house museums tripled in number between 1933 and 1941. Especially notable additions included the Wick farmhouse at Morristown where General Arthur St. Clair had quartered during the winter encamp-

ment. After park historians and architects had done basic research and restoration, wealthy local patrons of the park contributed furnishings deemed appropriate. CCC enrollees tended a suitably designed garden beside the house.²¹

Secretary of the Interior and PWA Administrator Harold Ickes personally promoted a different sort of historic house museum in Washington, allotting PWA funds to restore Pierce Mill in Rock Creek Park. On a March Sunday in 1937 more than 1,400 toured the restored structure. Volunteer guides recruited by park naturalist Donald E. McHenry included staff from the Museum Division in one of the first occasions of its active participation in a house museum project. Visitors watched the water wheel turning, the millstones rotating, and the miller controlling the flow of grain and meal through the belt-driven conveyors. The ground meal was sold to the public and sent to government cafeteria kitchens.²²

On the heels of this success the Service acquired an entire industrial community to develop. Hopewell Village (now Hopewell Furnace) National Historic Site, established in 1938, required restoration of an iron furnace and numerous surviving auxiliary structures. CCC workers already had begun the task. The park developed interim interpretation of the complex site, but serious attention to refurnishing the structures came after the war.

Another new park accounted for two more historic structure museums. Designated also in 1938, Salem Maritime National Historic Site included the Derby House, already open as a museum. The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities had acquired this house in 1927, made necessary repairs, installed items of furniture, and begun admitting visitors in 1928. When the Park Service became responsible, historical architect Stuart Barnette supervised a more thorough restoration of the structure starting in 1938. Edwin W. Small, the park's able superintendent, skillfully guided the refurnishing.²³ Within the historic site the Salem Custom House also fitted the prevailing definition of a historic house museum. The park opened the building to visitors, partially furnished one room to recall Nathaniel Hawthorne's employment there, later installed formal exhibits in another room, and made various uses of the available space as development plans for the site matured.

The Custom House with its mixed and changing utilization typified two more of the new historic structure museums. The Philadelphia Custom House became a national historic site in 1939, and the Old Courthouse in St. Louis became part of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in 1940. Both were architecturally important structures that would be adapted to new uses. The list of old forts entrusted to the Service grew to include Fort Jefferson, Florida, Fort Pulaski, Georgia, and Fort Laramie, Wyoming. The latter, quite different from the coastal fortifications, would later tax Service expertise in historic furnishings.

During the prewar years historic house museums in the parks fitted a general development pattern marked by three aspects. The strong central architectural organization of the Park Service recognized its responsibility when a historic structure needed to be preserved and exhibited. Under its aegis a qualified historical architect analyzed and evaluated the building, planned and supervised necessary restoration, and to an increasing extent made a faithful record of the process. In the parks staff historians began to contribute their research in cooperation with the architect. When it came to refurnishing a building to complete the recreation of the historic scene, the Museum Division offered the park little help. Although Carl Russell had encountered the Tumacacori Mission, the Moore House, and Fort McHenry at early stages of development, furnishing problems had not fired his interest. His staff had their hands full planning and building other kinds of exhibits. Consequently park superintendents proceeded on their own initiative to get historic house museums refurnished. Following practices common outside the Service, they obtained installations tilted more toward decorative arts displays than strict historical verisimilitude.

The park system expanded so much during the 1930s that no one had a clear grasp of the overall state of museums in it. The Museum Division did not know precisely how many museums the parks contained, their scopes, sizes, extent of development, staffing, or amount of use. In 1939 it launched a thorough survey to find the answers. Division staff tabulated and analyzed the returns to get a comprehensive view of Park Service museums as of June 1940.²⁴ Of the total of 114, 38 were historic house museums, defined as historic buildings of any sort—original or reconstructed and furnished or not—that were primarily on public exhibition as survivals of the past. To avoid an inflated list the analysis counted an organic group of historic structures such as Hopewell Village as a single museum. Thirteen of the 38 were furnished, 18 still needed to be, and seven were forts that did not appear to require furnishing. The historic house museums received about 1,250,000 visits annually.

The division could no longer overlook their needs. As a first step the *Field Manual for Museums*, in preparation while the survey was in progress, incorporated a chapter on historic house museums. It reinforced guidelines Coleman had offered in his 1933 book. Park Service house museums should meet the criterion of national significance. Each should be able to present particularly well a broad aspect of American life, or should have important association with the life of a great American, or should have been the setting of a memorable incident in American history. Architectural merit carried little weight. Assuming that most of these museums would be furnished, the chapter stated that interiors should represent the conditions that existed at the time of significance. It cautioned parks to undertake furnishing only in consultation with experts and on the basis of carefully

prepared and approved plans, newly required by implication in a concurrent directive. Parks should also ensure that outsiders who cooperated in furnishing projects agreed to abide by the decisions of the experts. Installation of formal exhibits in a house museum would require approval by the director as an exception to policy. The chapter clarified the status of historic furnishings as museum specimens subject to Service curatorial policies and procedures and included advice on maintenance and operational matters.²⁵

Events in the field soon drew the Museum Division into more active participation. In 1940 the Frederick W. Vanderbilt mansion in Hyde Park, New York, became a national historic site, the gift of Vanderbilt's niece. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose home stood nearby, showed interest in its preservation. The great house, its landscaped grounds, and its elegant furnishings posed many fresh problems of maintenance and interpretation. Superintendent Francis S. Ronalds of Morristown represented the Service in the transition to park management. Responsibility for the wealth of furnishings impressed him especially, and he sought the advice of division chief Ned Burns. Burns visited the site in April 1940 and underlined its museological problems in a statement of urgent needs he prepared for Director Newton Drury. He continued to advise and assist the new park with its curatorial concerns and had the museum laboratory prepare approach signs for the mansion as well.²⁶

Museum Branch Involvement, 1946-1955

Philosopher John Dewey, a founder of the progressive education movement, contended that students' interest needed to be aroused before expecting them to undertake the hard work of learning. (This concept may still influence modes of park interpretation.) Other educators believed instead that subjects grow in interest as students labor to master the fundamental details necessary to understand them. Certainly the lively and productive interest of the Museum Branch and its successors in furnished structure museums appears to belie Dewey. It developed slowly as a result of problems encountered and in some measure surmounted. Branch personnel found themselves drawn into laborious aspects of their development or operation as Service responsibilities expanded.

The Vanderbilt Mansion was a case in point. Another was the White House, for which the Park Service had received important housekeeping responsibilities in the 1933 reorganization. Its state rooms, containing treasured pieces from various presidencies, had been redecorated by a recent administration with the advice of a select committee of public-spirited citizens. In 1940, at Eleanor Roosevelt's request, the Service's National Capital Parks office undertook a special report on their furnish-

ings. It included floor plans indicating furniture placement, photographs of room interiors with the furniture in place, and individual photographs of each piece. Park historians set out to compile the history of each, digging through General Accounting Office records to find the acquisition documents.²⁷

National Capital Parks had no scholarly student of furnishings to analyze and identify the objects themselves. Knowledge in this field was rare because much basic research on furniture remained undone. Most people regarded as experts were antique collectors or dealers at best. An ill wind brought enough opportune help to emphasize the need. Hans Huth, a true scholar in such matters who had been forced out of Germany under the Nazi regime, became available to the Service's History Division for a time beginning in early 1940. While other assignments took most of his attention, Huth made a few discreet studies of White House furniture that clarified some points.²⁸

The war years intervened before the Service could expand its attention to White House furnishings. When park historian T. Sutton Jett returned from naval service, he received broad responsibility for historical work in National Capital Parks. Jett saw that the White House furnishings composed a nationally significant museum collection that needed cataloging and arranged for Ralph Lewis to be detailed from Jefferson National Expansion Memorial for the purpose. Reporting to Washington in June 1946, Lewis took part in the required annual White House property inventory with Jett and historian Stanley McClure to become acquainted with the collection, then developed a plan for the cataloging in on-site discussions with Ned Burns and Chief Historian Ronald Lee. He returned to Washington in August to spend a week with Jett and McClure applying catalog numbers to furnishings in the family quarters while President Harry S Truman and his family were away. Lewis's transfer to Washington that December in connection with the reopening of the museum laboratory enabled him to sandwich work on the White House catalog among other assignments. He continued on the project intermittently for the next year and a half before laboratory responsibilities left no further time for it.²⁹

Another involvement began in December 1946. Chief Historian Lee was deep in strategic planning that would lead to creation of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He looked to David Finley, director of the National Gallery of Art, as a potential ally. Finley in turn had become interested in Hampton, a great 18th-century house near Baltimore from which he was acquiring two fine portraits for the gallery. Architectural historians considered Hampton a prime example of Georgian architecture, and Finley proposed its donation to the Park Service. Lee wrestled with two policy questions: Should the Service undertake to preserve a structure significant primarily for aesthetic qualities? If so, could the Service

justifiably depend on outside support to manage it? He could not foresee adequate congressional funding for this purpose. He finally concluded that legislative mandate and national interest justified Service acceptance of Hampton as a national historic site even if some private organization had to be found to operate it.³⁰

While pondering these questions Lee outlined to Lewis, as the Museum Branch representative at hand, the furnishings aspects of the proposal. They spent December 19 at Hampton viewing and discussing the furnishings with the aging owner. Lewis then drafted a skeletal inventory with recommendations for exhibition. Occasions continued to arise before and after Hampton's acquisition for Museum Branch assistance in furnishing matters.³¹

Sutton Jett had as much concern with Arlington House as with the White House. In December 1946 he consulted the Museum Branch on cataloging the furnishings there and continued to enlist help with the mansion's museological problems. Jett grasped the basic importance of solid research in solving the dilemma of Arlington's too-rich and too-early furnishings. He succeeded in releasing the site historian, Murray Nelligan, for some two years of intensive study at the Library of Congress. Nelligan's analysis in depth of Arlington's occupants and their life on the estate undergirded the future development and interpretation of the house. It also provided an object lesson for the Museum Branch in attacking future furnishing problems.

The return of Park Service headquarters from Chicago to Washington in October 1947 enabled Ned Burns as branch chief to keep in closer touch with the expanding activities of his staff for furnished historic structure museums. He had not forgotten how vulnerable to deterioration many of the furnishings at Vanderbilt Mansion were. Service acquisition in 1945 of full responsibility for the neighboring Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site reinforced his concern for such problems. In March 1947 he arranged the transfer of preparator Albert McClure from the reopened museum laboratory in the Ford's Theatre building to Vanderbilt Mansion. McClure would function as a curator and objects conservator, although the latter was still an unnamed and scarcely recognized field of specialization. He would maintain a close watch on the condition of the furnishings, provide hands-on cleaning, reinforcement, and repair of pieces at risk when he felt qualified to do so, and call in specialists as necessary. He performed other strictly curatorial duties, and the park took advantage of his skills as a fine letterer and craftsman.

Through such decisive actions Burns earned widening respect for his grasp of technical problems and judgment in matters of historic furnishings. Henry Francis du Pont, laying plans to convert his great collection of period rooms to a public museum, consulted him in December 1950. During

his visit to Winterthur Burns noted aspects of du Font's operation that might prove applicable to Service historic house museums like Vanderbilt Mansion. Soon afterward Burns visited Vanderbilt Mansion and the Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt to review their furnishings care and share what he had learned at Winterthur.³²

In January 1951 the Park Service took over administration of Independence Hall and other structures in the nascent Independence National Historical Park. The buildings and the national treasures they contained remained in Philadelphia's legal ownership, but this only heightened Service responsibility for their stewardship. As noted previously, Burns promptly sent James Mulcahy from the museum laboratory to become curator of the Independence collections. Since McClure's transfer to Vanderbilt Mansion Burns had become much more aware of the scientific basis underlying the emerging profession of conserving historic and artistic works. He therefore did not expect Mulcahy to act as an objects conservator. Instead, when the need arose, the curator would call for thoroughly qualified help through the Museum Branch. As an early example, Mulcahy sent two important chairs to the laboratory where Burns could personally supervise the analysis of their condition and such restoration as they required.³³

The many complex problem areas facing the Service in the postwar years prompted the Washington Office to prepare and assemble better guidelines in a multi-volume *Administrative Manual*. A 1949 issuance had nothing new on house museums, but a 1952 volume expressly limited the term "historic house museum" to historic structures exhibited with furnishings. A revised statement of Coleman's stricture against putting systematic exhibits in a furnished structure followed. But if a structure did not require furnishing for its proper interpretation, it might in some circumstances house a regular park museum without serious loss. Similarly, if a large building needed only one or two rooms furnished to interpret its significance, museum exhibits might occupy other rooms. That year the Museum Branch listed 101 museums open to the public in the national park system. Fourteen of them met the new definition of historic house museum.³⁴

In Philadelphia the project staff developing the authorized but not yet established Independence National Historical Park faced the challenge of restoring and refurnishing Independence Hall. The Service needed to determine the nature and condition of the building inside and out as it was in 1775-87, then recreate as closely as possible the setting of the great events that occurred there. The work on this preeminent national treasure obviously had to meet the highest standards of accuracy.

Architects led by Charles Peterson and historians by Edward M. Riley undertook essential research. After three years of intensive study the historians estimated that they still needed to examine some ten million more

documents. As the magnitude of the problem became clear, so did the need to augment appropriated funds. In October 1952 project representatives conferred informally with officials of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Eight months later the federation and the Service reached a formal agreement. The federation would undertake to raise a considerable sum of money with which the Service would restore and refurnish the first floor of Independence Hall.

Ronald Lee, charged with setting up a committee of outside experts to advise on this major project, involved the Museum Branch in selecting its three members. Louise du Pont Crowninshield (Henry du Font's sister) brought assets of long association with historic furnishing projects, including those at George Washington Birthplace National Monument and Salem Maritime National Historic Site, and was active in support of the National Trust. As curator of the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Charles F. Montgomery ranked high among scholars refining available knowledge on the material culture of 18th-century America. Charles Nagel, an architect by profession, had much experience with American decorative arts as director in turn of the St. Louis City Art Museum and the Brooklyn Art Museum and curator of the great Garvin Collection at Yale. Lee and branch chief Ralph Lewis attended their meetings to keep in touch with their recommendations and reactions as work on the Assembly Room progressed. The committee received an extensive report from the project staff in January 1955.³⁵

The staff had already called on the Museum Branch for specific help. Project researchers became particularly interested in an old painting owned by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania showing the Continental Congress meeting in the Assembly Room and voting on the Declaration of Independence. Tradition attributed the painting to either of two Philadelphia artists who might have witnessed the event, Robert Edge Pine or Edward Savage. The historical society allowed the Service to borrow the painting and let the Museum Branch paintings conservator clean it. Close, critical examination during and after cleaning revealed to the fullest extent possible the valuable information it recorded.³⁶

Evolution of the Furnishing Plan, 1955-1982

To consolidate the various statements of Park Service museum policy that appeared during the 1930s, the director issued a lengthy memorandum applicable to all types of museums in March 1940. It reaffirmed the official status of these directives prior to their fuller discussion in the forthcoming *Field Manual for Museums*. "The necessity for adequate museum exhibit plans cannot be stressed too strongly," the memorandum declared. The *Field Manual* in turn stated explicitly, "The furnishing of a historic

structure should be undertaken only . . . on the basis of a carefully prepared and approved plan."³⁷ Both specified that an exhibit plan should receive the recommendation of the park superintendent, the regional director, and the Museum Division plus concurrence by the chief architect, the supervisor of historic sites, and the supervisor of research and information before submission to the director for approval. Both also provided specific advice on the preparation and content of exhibit plans for park museums but none for historic house museums except to consult a specialist. No one in the Museum Division, or perhaps elsewhere, had a clear conception of what should constitute a historic furnishing plan.

In 1955, for the first time, a park superintendent asked the Museum Branch to help prepare a furnishing plan. Andrew Johnson National Monument owned and exhibited under unsatisfactory circumstances the house that Johnson had bought in 1851 and held until his death. Funds had become available to restore it properly, involving painstaking research by historical architects, and its furnishings needed to meet equivalent standards. Complicating matters was the fact that the President's great-granddaughter, employed by the park to help oversee and interpret the house, wanted the house and furnishings to memorialize her grandparents as well as the President. She still owned significant furnishings and skillfully pressed her claims through political channels.

Responding to the superintendent's request, Ralph Lewis was able to spend four days at the park in July. He viewed the current furnishings and discussed the complexities of the task with the superintendent, house custodian, regional historian, and architect Charles Peterson. On this basis he drafted a tentative document that defined the specific interpretive purpose the museum should achieve, recommended furnishing the whole house as Andrew Johnson occupied it during 1869-75, and justified doing so room by room. Five attachments accompanied it: a review of the occupancy of the house throughout its ownership by the family (1851-1948); a discussion of changing uses of the rooms; proposed lists of furniture for each room according to three options (conforming to the 1879 inventory, using the furnishings currently exhibited in the house, or using only those items owned by the Service); a copy of the 1879 inventory; and a list of what the park would have to acquire to match it. The director approved this sketchy submission and hoped that it could be carried out in coordination with the architectural restoration.³⁸

From this first attempt at preparing a furnishing plan the Museum Branch learned that it lacked both the time and the specialized knowledge to provide what the Andrew Johnson project needed. It therefore arranged to borrow for the park the services of Vera B. Craig, museum curator at Morristown, whom the branch considered especially well qualified for the task. Her assignment called for a more thorough furnishing plan that would



Vera B. Craig. Staff curator and expert furnishing planner.

link the objects with Johnson's occupancy. She would also catalog the furniture and designate the items needing restoration or repair. She spent two weeks of hard work at the park in March 1956 and much overtime refining the plan back at Morristown.

Craig's plan analyzed the 1879 inventory more expertly and correlated it with the rooms in the dwelling. A set of floor plans designated the historic use of each. She chose the items to go in them, listed them by catalog number, and gave reasons for their selection. Estimated costs accompanied a room-by-room list of additional furnishings needed. Floor plans showed the intended placement of the furniture and such added

details as window dimensions. The branch received this substantive plan in early May and routed it for review like a park museum exhibit plan. In doing so it acted in accordance with the previously unused directive for furnishing plans issued in 1940 and repeated in the *Field Manual*. The July 13 transmittal to the director stated: "This is the first formal furnishing plan submitted for any of the Service's historic house museums. We regard it as a museum exhibit plan which should receive regular review and approval. It is hoped that in the future historic houses will be developed in accordance with such plans."³⁹ Director Conrad Wirth's approval the same day signaled establishment of a regular furnishing plan procedure.

Craig's plan lacked the systematic structure that would later develop, but it stood in sharp contrast to earlier Service practice and common practice outside the parks. It undertook to recreate accurately a historic environment for its historical significance, the proper justification and purpose of historic house museums in the national parks. Such museums would no longer aim to display artifacts in congenial settings as antiques or works of decorative art.

Putting into effect the provisions of an approved furnishing plan also required specialized curatorial knowledge and skill not ordinarily available in a park's existing staff. In June 1957 Craig, who had by then transferred

to the Museum Branch as a staff curator, resumed active involvement in the Andrew Johnson project. She and Henry A. Judd, the restoration architect, set a fine example of interdisciplinary collaboration as they conferred on selecting interior paint colors, wallpaper, and lighting fixtures, features of concern to both professional specialists. As the park obtained funds in the 1958 fiscal year to purchase needed furnishings, she assisted at critical points. She secured from a disaffected branch of the family a suite of "cottage" bedroom furniture matching the 1879 inventory and oversaw reproduction in the museum laboratory of painted oilcloth floor covering for the entrance hall.⁴⁰ Continuing need for her support demonstrated the problem of staffing and funding furnishing projects over an unavoidably extended period of time. Finding qualified furnishing curators to prepare the plans remained the first essential hurdle.

The need for another curator arose soon after the Andrew Johnson request. Service historical architects had recently restored Mount Locust, one of the original taverns along the Natchez Trace Parkway. The restored building required a furnishing plan and the Museum Branch was again asked to help. Probably at the suggestion of the architects the branch chose Worth Bailey to prepare it. Trained as a landscape architect, Bailey had become an able student of American material culture while supervising CCC enrollees at Colonial National Historical Park. He left the Service in 1939 for twelve years of curatorial work at Mount Vernon and was later employed by the National Trust. Fortunately the branch found him available, and he accepted temporary appointment as a consultant in April 1956. His plan for Mount Locust, approved by the director after full review in January 1957, proved scholarly and thorough.⁴¹

As the Mission 66 development program got underway, the prospect of more restoration and refurnishing projects seemed assured. This would require more furnishing planners, and a tentative search began. At the same time the branch undertook to refine its ideas of what a furnishing plan should contain. A field order issued February 4, 1958, restated the rule that exhibition of the interior of a historic structure required an approved furnishing plan, then specified six elements the plan must contain.⁴²

The first section (a) centered attention on the interpretive purpose, essential to justify development. The next section (b) defined the facts and ideas the furnished space would embody in a documented narrative of the historic occupants. All the evidence that could be found about furnishings present at the historic time composed the third section (c). With this foundation laid, the plan would proceed to specify in detail the furnishings to be exhibited (d). The fifth section (e) would supplement these specifications with floor plans and wall elevations to fix the location of each piece. Notes on sources and estimated costs for acquiring the furnishings (f) would complete the plan. The instructions suggested that the park historian would